

Testimony of Dr. Jonathan Gold
House Committee on Great Lakes and Environment
March 5, 2009

Good morning Representative Warren and Members of the committee. My name is Jonathan Gold and I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of H.B. 4402.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, a member organization that includes more than 1700 pediatricians in our state. The chapter members and its board have been vocal on this issue for several years.

As you know, lindane is a pesticide that is used as a treatment for head lice and scabies. Head lice are a nuisance that have never been associated with any serious disease, and scabies rarely causes disease in the developed world.. Lindane, on the other hand, has been associated with seizures, paresthesias, and other neurologic side effects. It is frequently used in ways that are dangerous and contrary to its labeled use. A report from MMWR documented 870 cases of unintentional lindane ingestion between 1998 and 2003.

There is more documented resistance to Lindane than other potential treatments as well. A study in the American Academy of Dermatology in 2001 found that lindane was the least effective available pediculocide and had grown less effective over time. The authors concluded that “there seems to be no reason for keeping this product on the market in the United States where lindane resistance has been documented.” A 2008 systematic review of scabies treatment also found that lindane was less effective than first line agents.

Because of the potential toxicity of lindane, the FDA recommended that it become a second line therapy for head lice in 1995. They issued a Black Box warning discussing potential adverse effects in 2003, and recommended caution especially in young children and breastfeeding and pregnant women. Nevertheless, a recent analysis by the Michigan Department of Community Health found that lindane use by small children continued. As of at least 2006 the Michigan Poison Control Centers continued to report calls regarding adverse events associated with lindane use, some in children less than 2 years old.

Attempts to reduce lindane use in Michigan by requiring MDCH approval for Medicaid patients did not appreciably affect the number of cases of head lice or scabies in Michigan. A similar lack of effect was noted in California after it banned lindane in 2002.

In summary, lindane is an agent that is becoming less effective over time and has more potential adverse effects than other treatment alternatives. Some physicians have asked to keep lindane available for those rare cases where lice or scabies do not respond to

standard treatments. This bill allows for that to happen... Physician supervision will assure that the medication is used safely and appropriately.

Some have suggested that the legislature shouldn't get involved in this issue because it sets a bad precedent. We do not see this as the legislature regulating medical practice but rather reinforcing what physicians and others who take care of children have been advocating for several years.

I thank you for your time and your attention.

Jonathan Gold, MD
Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics and Human Development
Michigan State University
Chair, Legislative Committee
Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

References

1. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2005 Jun 3;54(21):533-5
2. Arch Dermatol. 2001 Mar;137(3):287-92
3. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2007 Jul 18;(3):CD00032